

## **CHAPTER 2 – Military Decorations Authorized and Their Criteria**

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## CHAPTER 2. MILITARY DECORATIONS AUTHORIZED AND THEIR CRITERIA

A. Medals and Awards authorized for issue by DOT/Coast Guard. The ensuing paragraphs detail the military decorations authorized for awarding, by precedence, by DOT/Coast Guard awarding authorities. Those military decorations which must be approved by the Navy for Coast Guard members when operating with or under the Navy are listed in Chapter 2.B. The precedence order for all decorations (military and non-military) authorized for wear, and the applicability of the “O” and “V” device are listed on the table in Chapter 1.D.

1. Transportation Distinguished Service Medal.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to persons who have provided extraordinarily meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility while assigned in the Department of Transportation, either national or international, as may be assigned by the Secretary.
- b. Standard Opening Phrase for Citations: “Is cited for exceptionally meritorious service to the government of the United States as. . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: “The distinctive accomplishments of (NAME) reflect great credit upon himself/herself, the United States Coast Guard, and the Department of Transportation.”
- d. A sample citation and certificate will be inserted here:

2. Coast Guard Distinguished Service Medal.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to persons who, while serving any capacity with the Coast Guard, distinguish themselves by exceptionally meritorious service to the United States in a duty of great responsibility. To justify this decoration, exceptional performance of duty, clearly above that normally expected that has contributed materially to the success of a major command or project is required. In general the Coast Guard Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) will be awarded only to those officers in principal commands whose service is such as to justify the award. However, this shall not be interpreted to preclude the award of the DSM to any individual whose service meets the requirement. If there is any doubt as to the degree of service involved, the Legion of Merit is the more appropriate award.
- b. Standard Opening Phrase for Citations: “Is cited for exceptionally meritorious service to the Government of the United States in a position of great responsibility as. . .”

- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: “. . . leadership, dedication, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.”

- d. A sample citation follows:

[ **Sample citation** ] [ **Sample certificate** ]

### 3. Legion of Merit.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to persons for service comparable to the Distinguished Service Medal but in a duty of lesser though considerable responsibility. In general, the Legion of Merit (LOM) will be awarded to officers in lesser commands at sea or principal commands on shore whom have performed such exceptionally meritorious service as to justify the award of the DSM, except as to degree of merit. However, this should not be interpreted to preclude the award of the LOM to any individual, regardless of grade or rate, whose acts or services meet the requirements. When the degree of achievement or service rendered, although meritorious, is not sufficient to warrant the award of the LOM, the Meritorious Service Medal should be considered.
- b. Standard Opening Phrase for Citations. “Is cited for outstanding meritorious service as. . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations. “. . . ability, diligence, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.”

- d. A sample citation follows:

[ **Sample citation** ] [ **Sample certificate** ]

### 4. Distinguished Flying Cross.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to any persons who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S. Coast Guard, distinguish themselves by heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight. To justify this decoration for heroism, an act in the face of great danger, well above normal expectations, such as to distinguish the individual above those of comparable grade or rate performing similar service, is required. For achievement, the results accomplished must be so exceptional as to render the individual conspicuous among those of comparable grade or rate performing similar services. When heroic or extraordinary achievement is not sufficient to warrant the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal should be considered.

- b. Standard Opening Phrase for Citations. “Is cited for (heroism) (extraordinary heroism) (extraordinary achievement) while participating in aerial flight on the...”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations. “. . . actions (aeronautical) skill and valor were instrumental in the rescue of \_\_\_\_ victims. His/Her courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.”
- d. A sample citation follows:

[ Sample citation ] [ Sample certificate ]

5. Coast Guard Medal.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to any persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Coast Guard, distinguish themselves by heroism not involving actual conflict with any enemy. To justify this decoration, individuals must have performed a voluntary act of heroism in the face of great danger to themselves and such as to stand out distinctly above normal expectations. For acts of lifesaving or attempted lifesaving, the Coast Guard Medal requirements parallel those of the Gold Lifesaving Medal in that one displays extreme and heroic daring at the risk of one’s own life (see Chapter 4.) For members of the Coast Guard participating in an operation and performing outstanding heroic acts in saving or attempting to save a life, the Coast Guard Medal is clearly the more appropriate decoration, refer to chapter 4.
- b. Standard Opening Phrase for Citations. “Is cited for (extraordinary) heroism on. . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations. “. . . demonstrated remarkable initiative, exceptional fortitude, and daring in spite of imminent personal danger (in this rescue). His/Her courage and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.”
- d. A sample citation follows:

[ Sample citation ] [ Sample certificate ]

- 6. Purple Heart Medal. Awarded by the Commandant in the name of the President to any member of the Coast Guard or to any member of an Armed Force under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation or to any civilian national of the United States, who whiles serving under competent authority in any capacity with the Coast Guard has been or may hereafter be wounded or killed.
  - a. In any action against an enemy of the United States; in any action with an opposing Armed Force of a foreign country in which the Armed Forces of the United States are or have been engaged; while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed

conflict against an opposing Armed Force in which the United States is not a belligerent party; as a result of an act of any hostile foreign force; as the indirect result of enemy action; for example, injuries resulting from parachuting from a plane brought down by enemy or hostile fire; or as the result of maltreatment inflicted by captors while a prisoner of war.

A “wound” is defined as an injury to any part of the body from an outside force or agent, sustained while in action as described in the criteria. A physical lesion is not required, provided the concussion or other form of injury received was a direct result of the action engaged in, and required treatment by a medical officer (except in the case of a prisoner of war). Only one award is authorized for more than one wound or injury received at the same instant from the same missile, force, explosion, or agent. Awards will be made by reason of frostbite, malnutrition, dysentery, and exhaustion.

7. Meritorious Service Medal.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to persons who have distinguished themselves by outstanding noncombat meritorious achievement or service to the United States. To justify this decoration, the acts or service rendered must have been comparable to that required for the Legion of Merit but in a duty of lesser though considerable responsibility. This should not be interpreted to preclude the award to any individual regardless of grade or rate, whose outstanding meritorious achievement or service meet the requirements. The Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) is the noncombat counterpart of the Bronze Star Medal for the recognition of meritorious service and is parallel to the Air Medal. Therefore, acts of heroism of lesser degree than the Coast Guard Medal, and single acts of merit under operational conditions may justify this award. For Coast Guard personnel in a leave or liberty status, if deemed appropriate, the Silver Lifesaving Medal is the parallel award in the case of heroic acts involving the saving of life from perils of the water. When the degree of meritorious achievement or service rendered is not sufficient to warrant the award of the MSM, the Coast Guard Commendation Medal should be considered, when appropriate.
- b. Standard Opening Phrases for Citations: “Is cited for meritorious (heroic) service in the performance of duty as. . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: “...dedication and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the Coast Guard.”
- d. Sample Citation(s) follow:

**[Sample citation(s)]** **[Sample certificate]**

8. Air Medal.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to any persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Armed Forces of the United States distinguish themselves by heroic-meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight. To justify this decoration, the achievement must have been accomplished with distinction. Consideration may be given to a series of flights during flood duty or in the rescue of survivors from disaster. In adjudging the appropriate award for the various members of a flight crew, it is normally considered that the aircraft commander (officer or enlisted), as commanding officer in responsible control and flying the aircraft, is generally eligible for a higher award than other members of the flight crew. The remainder of the flight crew engaged in operations for which the aircraft commander receives recognition will receive recognition if the acts and/or services clearly merit an award. This is not intended to imply a crewmember should not receive the same award as the aircraft commander if circumstances warrant. When the heroic or meritorious achievement is not sufficient to warrant the award of the Air Medal, the Coast Guard Commendation Medal should be considered, when appropriate.
- b. Standard Opening Phrases for Citations: “Is cited for (heroic) (meritorious) achievement in aerial flight on. . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: “. . .actions and (aeronautical) skill were instrumental in the rescue of \_\_\_\_\_. His/Her courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.”
- d. Sample Citation(s) follow:

**[Sample citation]     [Sample certificate]**

9. Coast Guard Commendation Medal. (Formerly known as Commendation Ribbon with Metal Pendant.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to members of the Armed Forces of the United States serving in any capacity with the Coast Guard, for meritorious service resulting in unusual and outstanding achievement rendered while the Coast Guard is serving under Department of Transportation jurisdiction. Specifically, it may be awarded to persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Coast Guard including foreign military personnel, distinguish themselves by heroic or meritorious achievement or service. To merit this award, the acts or services must be accomplished or performed in a manner above that normally to be expected and sufficient to distinguish the individual above others of comparable grade or rating performing similar services, as set forth in the following:

- (1) For Acts of Heroism worthy of special recognition but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal when combat is involved; or the Coast Guard Medal or Meritorious Service Medal when combat is not involved;
  - (2) For Meritorious Achievement that is outstanding and worthy of special recognition, but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal or Air Medal when combat is involved; or the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal or Air Medal when combat is not involved. The achievement should be such as to constitute a definite contribution to the Service, such as an invention, or improvement in design, procedure, or organization;
  - (3) For Meritorious Service that is outstanding and worthy of special recognition but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal or Air Medal when combat is involved; or the Meritorious Service Medal or Air Medal when combat is not involved. The award may cover an extended period of time during which a higher award may have been recommended or received for specific act(s). The criteria, however, should not be the period of service involved, but rather the circumstance and conditions under which the service was performed. The performance should be well above that usually expected commensurate with an individual's grade or rate. If the meritorious service is not sufficient to warrant the award of a Coast Guard Commendation Medal, the Coast Guard Achievement Medal should be considered.
- b. Standard Opening Phrases for Citations: "Is cited for (heroic) outstanding achievement while . . ."
  - c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: ". . .dedication, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard."
  - d. Sample Citation(s) follow:

[ **Sample citation(s)** ] [ **Sample certificate** ]

#### 10. Coast Guard Achievement Medal.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. The award is given for professional and/or leadership achievement in a combat or noncombat situation based on sustained performance or specific achievement of a superlative nature and shall be of such merit as to warrant more tangible recognition than is possible by the Commandant's Letter of Commendation Ribbon, but which does not warrant a Coast Guard Commendation Medal or higher award.
  - (1) Professional Achievement. To merit the award, professional achievement must clearly exceed that which is normally required or expected, considering the

individual grade or rate, training and experience, and must be an important contribution that is beneficial to the United States and the United States Coast Guard.

- (2) Leadership Achievement. To merit the award, leadership achievement must be noteworthy; be sustained so as to demonstrate a high state of development or, if for a specific achievement, be of such merit as to earn singular recognition for the act(s); and reflect most creditably on the efforts of the individual toward the accomplishments of the mission.
- b. Standard Opening Phrases for Citations: “Is cited for superior performance of duty while . . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: “. . . diligence, perseverance, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.”
- d. Sample Citation(s) follow:

**[Sample citation(s)] [ Sample certificate ]**

#### 11. Commandant’s Letter of Commendation.

- a. Eligibility Requirements. Awarded to a military person serving in any capacity with the Coast Guard for an act or service resulting in unusual and/or outstanding achievement but lesser than that required for the Achievement Medal.
- b. Standard Opening Phrases for Citations: “I note with pride and am pleased to commend you for your performance of duty . . .”
- c. Standard Commendatory Remarks for Citations: “You are hereby authorized to wear the Commandant’s Letter of Commendation Ribbon Bar.”
- d. Sample Citation(s) follow:

**[Sample citation]**

#### B. Medals and Awards Authorized for Issue by Department of Defense (DOD).

(For Coast Guard members when operating with or under DOD). The ensuing paragraphs detail the military decorations authorized for awarding to Coast Guard members by DOD, by precedence, when operating with or under the Navy.

1. Medal of Honor. Awarded by the President in the name of Congress to persons, who while serving as members of the Coast Guard, distinguish themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives above and beyond the call of duty:



- a. While engaged in action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.
  - b. There must be no margin of doubt or possibility of error in awarding this honor. To justify the award, individuals must clearly render themselves conspicuous above their comrades by an act so outstanding that it clearly distinguishes gallantry beyond the call of duty from lesser forms of bravery; and it must be the type of deed which, if not done, would not subject them to any justified criticism. The deed must be without detriment to the mission of their command or to the command to which attached.
2. Navy Cross. Awarded to persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps, distinguish themselves by extraordinary heroism, not justifying the award of the Medal of Honor.
  - a. While engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.
  - b. To warrant this decoration, the act or the execution of duty must be performed in the presence of great danger or at great personal risk. It also must be performed in such a manner as to render the individual highly conspicuous among others of equal grade, rate, experience, or position of responsibility. An accumulation of minor acts of heroism does not justify the award. When recommending the award, bear in mind the high standards demanded.
3. Silver Star. Awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps, is cited for gallantry in action that does not warrant a Medal of Honor or Navy Cross.
  - a. While engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
  - b. While engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force, or;
  - c. While serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.
4. Bronze Star Medal. Awarded to any persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Armed Forces of the United States, distinguish themselves after 7 December 1941 by heroic or meritorious achievement or service not involving participation in aerial flight.
  - a. While engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States.

- b. While engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force;
  - c. While serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. To justify this decoration, accomplishment or performance of duty above that normally expected, and sufficient to distinguish the individual among those performing comparable duties, is required, although less than the requirements for the Legion of Merit.
5. Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal. Awarded to persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps (including foreign military personnel and members of U.S. Reserve Components on active or inactive duty), distinguish themselves by heroic or meritorious achievement or service. To merit this award, the acts or services must be accomplished or performed in a manner above that normally to be expected and sufficient to distinguish the individual above others of comparable grade or rate performing similar services, as set forth in the following:
- a. For Acts of Heroism. Worthy of special recognition but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal when combat is involved, or the Navy and Marine Corps Medal when combat is not involved.
  - b. For Meritorious Achievement. Outstanding and worthy of special recognition but not to the degree required for the Bronze Star Medal or Air Medal when combat is involved, or the Meritorious Service Medal or Air Medal when combat is not involved. The achievement should be such as to constitute a definite contribution to the naval service, such as an invention, or improvement in design, procedure, or organization.
6. Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. Awarded to enlisted and commissioned members of the Navy and Marine Corps, including members of Reserve components on active or inactive duty, of the grade of lieutenant commander/major and junior thereto, for service performed on or after 1 May 1961. It may also be awarded to members of other branches of the Armed Forces of comparable grade or rate, when attached to, or serving with, units of the Department of the Navy. The award is given for professional and/or leadership achievement in a combat or noncombat situation based on sustained performance or specific achievement of a superlative nature, and shall be of such merit as to warrant more tangible recognition than is possible by a fitness report or evaluation sheet, but which does not warrant a Navy Commendation Medal or higher.
- a. Professional achievement that merits the award must clearly exceed that which is normally required or expected, considering the individual's grade or rate, training and experience and be an important contribution that is beneficial to the United States and the Naval Service.

- b. Leadership achievement that merits the award must be noteworthy and sustained so as to demonstrate a high state of development or, if for specific achievement, be of such merit as to earn singular recognition for the act(s). The achievement must reflect most creditably on the efforts of the individual toward the accomplishment of the unit mission.
  - c. The Navy Achievement Medal will not be awarded for service involving participation in aerial flight prior to 1 January 1969. The Air Medal is the more appropriate recognition for heroic/meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight. This does not preclude the award of the Navy Achievement Medal to those who meet the eligibility requirement during which participation in aerial flight was incidental.
7. Combat Action Ribbon. Awarded to members of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, when the Coast Guard or units thereof operate under the control of the Navy, in the grade of captain and junior, who have actively participated in ground or surface combat. Personnel who earned the Combat Infantry Badge (CIB) while a member of the U.S. Army may be authorized to wear the Combat Action Ribbon in lieu of the CIB upon submission of evidence of having earned the Combat Infantryman Badge. The principal eligibility criterion is that the individual must have participated in a ground or surface combat firefight or action during which the individual was under enemy fire, and performance while under fire must have been satisfactory. The Combat Action Ribbon is intended to be restrictive and awarded only in bona fide cases of combat and not as a campaign ribbon. The following amplifying remarks are furnished as guidance:
- a. Personnel in riverine and coastal operations, assaults, patrols, sweeps, ambushes, convoys, amphibious landings and similar activities who have participated in firefights are eligible.
  - b. Personnel assigned to areas subjected to sustained mortar and artillery attacks and who have actively participated in retaliatory or offensive actions are eligible.
  - c. Personnel in clandestine or special operations such as UDT, reconnaissance, and SEAL teams are eligible when the risk of enemy fire was great and it expected to be encountered.
  - d. Personnel aboard a ship are eligible when the safety of the ship and the crew were endangered by enemy attack, such as a ship hit by a mine or a ship engaged by shore, surface, air or subsurface elements.
  - e. Personnel eligible for the award of the Purple Heart Medal would not necessarily qualify for the Combat Action Ribbon.
  - f. The Combat Action Ribbon will not be awarded to personnel for aerial combat; however, a pilot or crewmember forced to escape or evade after being forced down would be eligible for the award.

- g. The Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps may delegate authority to award the Combat Action Ribbon to commanders of flag or general officer ranks. Delegated authorities will forward copies of correspondence authorizing the award of the Combat Action Ribbon to the Chief of Naval Operations/Commandant of the Marine Corps for record purposes. The original of all correspondence authorizing the award to Coast Guard personnel will be transmitted to the Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard for final action. The Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard is delegated authority to award the Combat Action Ribbon to Coast Guard personnel serving under control of the Navy.